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ARISTASIA: THE FEMININE EMPIRE

Essence and Substance: the Keys to Traditional Science

In beginning to explain the traditional philosophy we are faced with the problem of where to start. The traditional philosophy is like a tapestry. Each thread makes full sense only in relation to the other threads. As we understand each new aspect of the traditional wisdom, all the other aspects become clearer in the light of it. Conversely, when we are just beginning, we have no lights to help us. We must take the plunge and begin somewhere, trusting that as we proceed things will gradually become clearer and clearer.

Various aspects of the traditional wisdom might be taken as a starting-point, but perhaps the most fundamental of all is the science of the two principles which underlie the manifestation of the universe.

Aristotle called these two principles *Morphe* and *Hyle*; the Hindus refer to them as *Purusha* and *Prakriti*; the Chinese tradition names them *T'ien* and *Ti*; the Mediaeval Scholastics speak of *Forma* and *Materia*. We shall use the names Essence and Substance.

What are these two fundamental principles upon which everything we know is based? Perhaps the Scholastic/Aristotelian designation of Form and Matter is a good starting point for understanding them. Everything that is consists of Form manifested in Matter.

Aristotle illustrates this concept with the image of a statue. Let us say we have a statue of the Goddess Diana carved in marble. What is the Form or Essence of this statue? The shape of the Goddess. What is its Substance? Marble. Now, suppose we could remove the Essence or Form from the statue. We should no longer have a statue of Diana. What should we have? Simply a piece of marble. Now, is this piece of marble pure Substance or Matter? Certainly not, because it still has qualities – thus it still has Essence or Form. What are those qualities? The qualities of marble. The Essence or Form of what remains is marble-ness. Now, suppose we could remove this Essence too. Suppose we could take the marble-ness away from this piece of stone. What should we have? Pure stone – not marble or granite or limestone, but pure stone, the substance underlying all stone. Of course, we can never see pure stone on earth. All manifest stone has to be some particular *form* of stone – marble or jade or flint. But is this Stone, even stripped of the Essence of any particular stone, pure Substance? It is not, because it still has *qualities* – the qualities of stone-ness.

Now, in theory, we could go on stripping away qualities or Forms or Essences, until we were left with pure Substance, or Matter – *Materia Prima* as the Scholastics called it. What would this pure Matter be like? Clearly it would not be like *anything*. It would have no Form, no Essence, no *qualities*. So, it would have no color, no weight, no texture, no sound,

no scent. It would not be hard or soft, cool or hot, rough or smooth. Obviously, then, we could not see it, feel it, smell it, taste it, or hear it. We could not perceive it in any way. Indeed, it is not a *physical* thing at all. All physical things must have Essence *and* Substance. The very definition of a manifest thing is that it is a combination of Essence and Su Form impressed on Matter. Pure Essence and pure Substance of necessity lie outside m which is not the same thing as saying they do not exist.

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It some time to familiarize yourself with the concepts of Essence and Substance, because they lie at the ve of the traditional view of the universe. Everything else begins to fall into place in the light of this ar

It is interesting to note, in this context, the findings of scientists who have attempted to probe the inner nature of matter. The more we learn about sub-atomic particles, the more they seem to defy all normal physical description. They seem at times to behave like particles and at other times to behave like waves. They do things which would normally be called physical impossibilities, and scientists are compelled to surmise that they are not physical entities at all in any sense of the term that means anything to us. What they seem to be, we are told, is pieces of *pure information*.

Now this is patently absurd. How can information exist on its own with nothing to inform? – and remember, there *is* nothing for these sub-atomic particles to inform, because they are supposed to be *everything*; that is, every material thing is built up from them and nothing else. Scientists themselves admit the logical impossibility of the thing – the fact that the whole mechanistic, materialistic system of modern science turns out to be based upon an impossibility. The laws of cause and effect upon which science is based fall to pieces as we reach the very foundations of matter itself.

Nevertheless, this description makes perfect sense in the light of the traditional doctrine. Essence is precisely *pure information*. It informs – forms from within – every material entity. Essence is Form – or information – working on Substance, and Substance can only be seen when the light of Essence is shining on it. We can only perceive marble, for example, because of its *qualities* – its hardness, color, weight, *stone-ness*.

At the sub-atomic level we cannot detect the Substance upon which Essence is working. This is because there is some truth in the scientist's belief that he is "getting to the very building blocks of matter itself", and while he is not, and could not be, at the level of Pure Substance or *Prima Materia*, he *is* seeing Matter stripped of many of its Essential qualities. Consequently, at this level, Matter is no longer prehensible, and all that can be seen is the low-level action of Essence, which *appears* to be acting on its own as "pure information", but is in fact in-forming Matter at a very rudimentary level.

Modern science bases itself exclusively upon a purely material and quantitative approach and upon the assumption that everything can be explained from the side of Matter, ignoring Essence altogether. There is an irony – but in fact it is something more than a mere accidental irony – in the fact that it should, upon approaching what ought to be, as it were, its own domain *par excellence* – the nearest we can get in manifestation to "pure Matter" – run headlong into the problem of Essence and see its material and quantitative axioms go up in smoke.

It is also important for us to realize from the outset that when we speak of Essence and Substance as the fundamental principles of cosmic manifestation, we are not talking merely of philosophical abstractions or ancient notions that have been superseded by modern science; we are speaking of vital truths that have always been true. While they may have *seemed* to be rendered obsolete in the comfortable, closed world of 18th- and 19th-century "scientific" materialism, they are thrown into sharp relief by the findings of 20th century atomic- and astro-physics and shown to be vitally relevant.

See also: The Aristasian philosophy of Essentialism.

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2. *For a fuller exposition of this science, see chapter 5 of* The Feminine Universe.
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